

August 4, 2020

Dear USC community,

Greetings. I hope this email finds you and your families safe and well. I am writing to update you on the initiatives I announced several weeks ago to confront systemic racism at USC.

Over the past month, thousands of people have offered opinions and proposals for the change needed. They generously and courageously shared their experiences in letters, webinars, online, and by phone. Each voice is important; each story adds another layer of humanity and urgency to our work.

Some actions have come swiftly – for example, USC celebrated Juneteenth this year for the first time. Students, faculty, and staff shared personal stories and insights—and the gathering was deeply moving. Nearly 1,700 people joined us, and we look forward to seeing that number grow next year, as we make this an annual event on the University's calendar. USC also moved quickly to remove the name of Rufus Von KleinSmid from the Center for International and Public Affairs.

Schools and departments held numerous webinars and forums; others were hosted by students, staff, and faculty. Many people said this was the first time that issues of anti-Black racism, structural bias, and lack of institutional support were so openly discussed. The Provost, Deans, senior vice presidents, vice presidents, Athletic department leadership, and I participated in many of these, including a Trojan Council Forum, where we took a closer look at USC's past work in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We discussed affordability initiatives, the expansion of the Neighborhood Academic Initiative's pipeline, the work of the Culture Commission, and faculty diversity, among other topics. Provost Professor Shaun Harper described the [USC Center for Race and Equity's](#) model for DEI training, and our discussion was wide-ranging and productive. We have been keeping close track of the concerns raised in these discussions, and many suggestions are under consideration.

A number of other actions are proceeding, and we will provide updates on our [Diversity website](#):

1. **Reporting Incidences of Bias.** Over the past several weeks, we have witnessed powerful testimonies from our fellow Trojans on the Black@USC Instagram account and other online venues that must be addressed. We want to assure the entire USC community that we treat matters pertaining to unlawful racial bias – or any type of bias or discrimination with utmost seriousness. We encourage those who have experienced bias, harassment, or discrimination to contact the new Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity and

Title IX by emailing titleix@usc.edu. We will follow up on every incident reported and will hold individuals accountable whenever possible.

2. Community Advisory Board for the Department of Public Safety. We have completed the formation of our [Community Advisory Board for the USC Department of Public Safety \(DPS\)](#) and named 19 members, including student, faculty, and community representatives. Co-chaired by Dr. Ange-Marie Hancock, Dean's Professor of Gender Studies and Professor of Political Science, and Dr. Erroll Southers, Director of the Safe Communities Institute and Professor of the Practice in National and Homeland Security, this board will help us ensure an environment in which people feel safe and respected, and will strengthen the trust between the University, DPS, and our broader community.

Many of you have written asking for a thoughtful and thorough examination of our public safety practices, including hiring, finances, accountability, and bias training, and this board will do just that. The board's discussions will draw on a diverse group of voices from across the institution and in our local neighborhoods. This is a critical point if we hope to achieve the type of inclusive collaboration needed to break down barriers to meaningful progress. The board reports directly to me and is administered by the Provost's Office.

3. President's and Provost's Task Force on Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI). The task force is taking shape, and will be co-chaired by Dr. Manuel Pastor, a Distinguished Professor of Sociology and American Studies and Ethnicity, and Felicia A. Washington, Senior Vice President for Human Resources. Their combined experience in examining these issues is exceptional, and they will work closely with members of the task force to identify structural and institutional processes at USC that perpetuate racism and inequality in areas such as recruitment, retention, and experiences. They will also look for processes and programs that work well—and find creative ways to expand and strengthen their influence.

The task force will include faculty, staff, undergraduates, and graduate students, collectively representing a broad range of experiences and backgrounds. This task force will report directly to the Provost and me, and it will be administered by the Provost's Office.

4. Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officer. Our search for the University's first Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officer (CIDO) is well underway. Provost Chip Zukoski and SVP Felicia Washington are leading the search, and the search committee has invited members of the USC community to share their thoughts on key priorities and expectations for this critical role in several listening sessions that are continuing this week. The new CIDO will be a Vice President, and a member of my senior leadership team.

5. Space and Programming for Underserved Students. We will launch the First Generation Plus Success Center in the fall semester. Its programs will include high touch advising and coaching, virtual peer mentorship, assistance to access financial aid and scholarships, and a variety of online student success workshops to help first-generation, transfer, and DACA students succeed at USC. The center will also provide a physical space in our student union dedicated to our first-generation plus students. We also will be offering expanded programming and space for our Black, Asian Pacific American, Latinx/Chicanx, Veteran, LGBTQ+, Native American, and Middle Eastern students, as well as for students who need accessibility services.

6. Mandatory Unconscious Bias Training. As part of our efforts to educate the community about how to recognize and prevent implicit bias from affecting how we treat each other, online training modules for students, staff, and faculty will roll out in the fall semester to provide baseline education. These modules are being vetted and informed by students, faculty, and staff. In addition to these modules, we have been and will continue to encourage open discussions about improving this training. For example, this month, we are holding a summer webinar series, [Racial Justice + Social Equity + Well-Being](#), which will be held each Tuesday. We are developing a number of in-person workshops and programs that will launch when we are fully back on campus, and will continue to consult widely with students, faculty, and others to create meaningful programs with significant impact.

7. Renaming Center for International and Public Affairs. We will be initiating an inclusive process to rename the building early in the fall semester. Our goal is to choose an individual from our community whom all can celebrate. Our nomenclature committee is also developing a comprehensive process for reviewing building names on campus that we plan to discuss with the Board of Trustees in October.

8. Community Collaboration. Soon, we will announce new initiatives that recognize the University's important role – and responsibility – in helping to advance local economic opportunity and equity. This includes strengthening collaborative partnerships with minority and women-owned small businesses, community non-profits, economic development organizations, and the public sector to create good-paying jobs and support investment in the local community.

We recently lost one of our nation's most influential civil rights leaders, John Lewis. In his final, beautiful essay published on the day of his funeral, he urged each of us to "answer the highest calling of (our) hearts and stand up for what (we) believe." His message serves as a guiding principle for our work ahead.

More than half a century before most schools even began to think about diversity and equity, USC's student body included women, people of color, and international scholars. Fostering a diverse community always has been central to our mission. We must hold ourselves accountable to that mission today, assess our progress, and take meaningful and lasting actions; and we must be able to point to real results and real accomplishments along the path. Some of these accomplishments may seem small, but they all contribute to a larger success, and to achieving the ultimate goal of ending bias, bigotry, and discrimination.

Together, we will deliver on our commitment to being a truly diverse, equal, and inclusive university.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol L. Folt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carol L. Folt
President

cc: President's Senior Leadership Team
Academic Deans
Provost's Leadership Team
Academic Senate
Staff Assembly
GSG President
USG President